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**In Search of “Tremendous Frontiers”:
A Socially Redemptive Reframing of Flannery O’Connor’s
“The Displaced Person”**

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By Kira R. Leander

Thesis Director
Dr. Evan Gurney

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Merritt Moseley

“I know that the writer does call up the general and maybe essential through the particular, but this general and essential is still deeply embedded in mystery”, wrote Flannery O’Connor in her collection of letters *The Habit of Being*. “It is not answerable to any of our formulas. It doesn’t rest finally in a storable kind of solution” (516). An emphasis on mystery and ambiguity in O’Connor’s work has long kept scholars working as theological detectives. Words such as grace, redemption, violence, and Christ-figure are most frequently used to frame O’Connor’s short stories, giving the implications of her work an almost entirely religious tone. But this is the case for good reason. In *Mystery and Manners*, her collection of prose, and *The Habit of Being*, O’Connor repeatedly emphasizes that her vision of the world is one in which the spiritual and the material are inextricably intertwined and that our earthly experiences constantly urge us toward a heavenly reality. Thus her characters through their unfortunate circumstances and the violence that frequently befalls them reveal that “human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and change is painful” (*HB*, 307). With few exceptions, the scholarly solution to the mystery and ambiguity embedded in O’Connor’s work has been to highlight her condemnation of self-reliance and arrogance, to justify her use of violence, and to discuss the process of spiritual redemption for the individual.

However, this “case closed” mentality presents an irony within O’Connor scholarship. Robert Donahoo, former president of the Flannery O’Connor Society, recognizes this irony and in his essay “Everything That Rises Does Not Converge: The State of O’Connor Studies” asks if O’Connor herself would find this type of scholarship contradictory to the literary art she created. He believes that our readings and interpretations of O’Connor’s short stories have become much too narrow-minded in an attempt to resolve the shock that the violence in her work often invokes. In an analysis of one of her letters, Donahoo summarizes, “[O’Connor] then returns to her

complaint focusing specifically on religious critics who search fiction looking for ‘some ideal intention’, and she implies an appreciation of secular critics when she adds, ‘In the gospels it was the devils who first recognized Christ and the evangelists didn’t censor this information. They apparently thought it was a pretty good witness’” (241). Donahoo strongly urges in the aforementioned essay two changes he desires for the future of O’Connor studies: firstly, “the ability to open up and deepen awareness of mystery in her work” and secondly, “the ability to be generative rather than mummifying” (243). If we are to move away from scouring O’Connor’s fiction for “some ideal intention” then perhaps it also stands that the established religious framework through which her work is traditionally viewed must be broadened. Following Donahoo’s imperative, this essay will give more attention and consideration to O’Connor’s portrayal of societal inequalities and constructs of power and in doing so will aim to expand and make fresh the worn path in search of what more we can gain from her work’s mysteries. By entering into conversation with modern literary critics and cultural theorists, such as Doreen Fowler and Julia Kristeva, I will interrogate O’Connor’s theme of displacement as a means to discover the “transformative interchanges between self and other” (Fowler, 134).

The theme of displacement, both physically and socially, in O’Connor’s work offers a rich starting point for fostering this expansion. “The Displaced Person”, O’Connor’s longest story, is included in the collection *The Complete Stories*, published posthumously in 1971. It centers around the events that unfold after Mrs. McIntyre, a self-centered and money-worried atheist, welcomes to her farm, at the prompting of a Catholic priest, a family of Polish Holocaust refugees, the Guizacs. Mr. Guizac’s incredible work ethic earns him Mrs. McIntyre’s admiration and, despite her hesitant acceptance of his foreign ways, she begins to regard him as “her salvation” (203), rescuing the farm’s economic failings from the “sorry people...white trash and

niggers” she has hired in the past (202). Mrs. Shortely, another hired hand, is so disturbed by Mr. Guizac’s foreignness, describing the way he speaks as “dirty and all-knowing and unreformed” (209) that she self-righteously arms herself with Christian doctrine in hopes of protecting herself from the Guizac’s “devilishness” (203). After overhearing Mrs. McIntyre confirm her fears that Mrs. McIntyre’s family may become displaced from the farm, she forces her family to pack, shouting at her husband, “You ain’t waiting to be fired!” (212), and leaves abruptly. Mrs. Shortely dies of heart attack as she rushes away from the farm but not before she has “found the tremendous frontiers of her true country” (214), or recognizes her identity in the larger scheme of reality. The second half of the story focalizes Mrs. McIntyre who begins her gradual decline into emotional instability when she experiences an “interior violence” (224) after Mr. Guizac betrays her confidence by asking one of her black workers to marry his niece detained in a German concentration camp. Mr. Guizac’s ignorance to the societal hierarchy created by Mrs. McIntyre creates fear and hatred within her, leading to her passive participation in his murder. Mrs. McIntyre herself becomes displaced and abandoned at the story’s end, leaving readers with a heavy sense of ambiguity as to the possibility of her redemption or transformation.

Within the traditional framework, analysis of this story has lead scholars to focus primarily on the theme of spiritual displacement. Robert Fitzgerald, for example, wrote the essay “The Countryside and the True Country” in 1962 that is still today frequently referenced in O’Connor scholarship. Fitzgerald’s symbolic reading of “The Displaced Person” concludes that O’Connor’s intent is to reveal how every individual in the South, and by extension every individual on Earth, is a spiritually displaced person searching for the “tremendous frontiers of [their] true country”, which are found only in our acceptance of God’s will and design (390). O’Connor, Fitzgerald says, believes that “estrangement from Christian plentitude is estrangement

from the true country of man” (394) and that unity with God is humanity’s true home and space of belonging. Sister Kathleen Feeley, former President of the College of Notre Dame, agrees with Fitzgerald’s points on spiritual estrangement and symbolism and in her influential book *Flannery O’Connor: Voice of the Peacock*, she discusses the effects O’Connor’s “unified vision of reality” (54) had on her fiction. She notes that in “The Displaced Person” there is “always a connection between man’s ability to see visible reality truly, and his openness to spiritual reality” (55). Pointing to secularization and rationalization as her targets, Feeley summarizes the characters’ experiences of alienation as a consequence of how “each of these characters, knowingly or unwittingly, makes himself a ‘new jesus’- a shrunk spiritless semblance of man” (84). Feeley believes that it is O’Connor’s intention to expose how estrangement from God in fact prevents us from our full humanity.

Scholars working within a theological framework in search of meaning in O’Connor’s stories often look to her substantial use of symbolism for support. In her essay “Thematic Centers in ‘The Displaced Person’”, Sister M. Joselyn explores the symbolic, three-sided relationship between the figures of the peacock, Mr. Guizac, and Christ. She notes, as does Fitzgerald, that the peacock cannot merely be dismissed as an odd figure within the story but that its symbolic presence is inseparable from the other two, perhaps more evident, transformative figures (86). Joselyn depicts how a character’s regard for or ability to notice the peacock coincides with their relationship to the Displaced Person and thus, by extension, to Christ. The priest, the most reverent admirer of the peacock, is also the most charitable to the Guizacs and the most loving of Christ. Mrs. Shortely hardly notices the peacock despite its overwhelming beauty, reflecting her dismissive attitude toward the trials of the displaced persons. For example, as Mrs. Shortely contemplates her anxiety around the Guizacs arrival, the peacock stands beside

her, his tail “full of fierce planets with eyes that were each ringed in green and set against a sun that was gold...” while Mrs. Shortely “might have been looking at a map of the universe but she didn’t notice it anymore than she did the spots of sky that cracked the dull green of the tree” (200). Mrs. Shortely’s restricted literal vision is a central symbol to the story, brought to fruition at the end of her life when she is able to take in the totality of what is both within and without her (214). Finally, Mrs. McIntyre’s desires to be rid of the birds eventually mimic her hatred and misunderstandings of the Guizacs and her animosity towards Christ, as presented by the priest.

While O’Connor’s use of the peacock as a symbol for Christ and by extension, the Displaced Person, is beautifully elaborate and powerfully executed, it has also limited our attentions to the true scope of her work. For example, little scholarship mentions how the relationships of Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortely to the black workers on the farm provide a concrete example of the oppressive power structures already in place before the arrival of the Guizacs. Mrs. McIntyre speaks frankly and condescendingly to the then nameless “Old Negro”, stating, “What you colored people don’t realize...is that I’m the one around here who holds the strings together. If you don’t work, I don’t make any money and I can’t pay you. You’re all dependent on me but each and every one act like the shoe is on the other foot” (217). Mrs. McIntyre regards the black workers as a means to an end of economic success, instrumentalizing and thus dehumanizing them. While spiritual blindness to the symbolism of the peacock is certainly significant within the story, it is ultimately this dehumanization of others that accounts for the story’s violent end.

Traditional, theological readings of “The Displaced Person” and of O’Connor’s work at large have offered us a structure of universal equality that is accessed through both our shared spiritual estrangement from God and our potential for spiritual belonging with God. The focus of

spiritual redemption as the end towards which O'Connor's didactic tales urge us operates under the assumption that the individual is not whole, but is in great need of something "other" than themselves, or God, for completion. O'Connor noted that, in comparison with secular thinking, the desire for spiritual redemption rooted in Catholic theology provides a medium for positive change for our present lives as well as for eternity. In *Mystery and Manners* she wrote, "Redemption is meaningless unless there is cause for it in the actual life we live, and for the last few centuries there has been operating in our culture the secular belief that there is no such cause" (33). However, on this point I respectfully disagree. O'Connor was creating the majority of her work during the Interwar period and into World War II during which a growing urgency for global justice, the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the beginnings of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement were all led by those coming from both religious and secular backgrounds. Their commonality, however, was a desire for change and transformation from past wrongs into a redeemed future and while the traditionally applied theological framework for analyzing O'Connor has exposed the importance of redemption, it has also limited our focus primarily to desiring redemption solely for the individual. It has concerned itself with the epiphany and religious resolution in Mrs. Shortely's death or the ambiguity in Mrs. McIntyre's "interior violence" and decline (224) but has rarely addressed both women's position of power or subjugation within the farm's societal structure. It has pointed to the death of Mr. Guizac, the Displaced Person, as a stand-in for the death of Christ but has failed to fully acknowledge the cultural discrimination and prejudice that creates the circumstances leading up to his murder. By reframing "The Displaced Person" as a story that is just as much about societal reform and restructuring as it is about spiritual awakening, we may move away from instrumentalizing the Displaced Person only as an agent of divine grace and look to how

O'Connor portrays a microcosm of the complexities of modern society, offering a chance at societal redemption.

Karl Martin, Department Chair of Journalism, and Modern Languages at Point Loma Nazarene University, published the article "The Prophetic Intent of O'Connor's 'The Displaced Person'" that works to establish a social justice framework and briefly expose the power structures functioning specifically in this story. Martin regards "The Displaced Person" with particular importance, introducing it as literature deserving "greater critical attention" as it presents "challenges [to] the superficial religious beliefs, oppressive political practices, and abusive economic structures of postwar America" (137). Martin brings O'Connor's perspective from *Mystery and Manners* of "the prophetic vision [as] peculiar to any novelist" (138) into conversation with Walter Brueggemann's text *The Prophetic Imagination* in which he argues that "in order to criticize her culture, a prophet must attack 'the royal consciousness', a three-part system of cultural organization" (139). The three identifying markers of this oppressive and "nearly impenetrable system" (139) include a religion of immanence or the belief that God has blessed and supports a particular group above others, an economics of affluence or the false insistence that prosperity is experienced by all, and a politics of oppression. Martin believes that it is the role of the prophet to expose and deconstruct the royal consciousness stating that, "The prophet must reveal not only that the prosperity is not universal but also that this prosperity, the culture's source of pride, results from the oppression of the poor of society- not from the blessings of God" (139). For O'Connor, Martin, and Brueggeman, the ability to offer this form of cultural critique so as to shed light on an inevitable need for societal change is the defining characteristic of the prophet. Martin argues that O'Connor herself is a prophet critiquing postwar America and that "The Displaced Person" reveals how the royal consciousness imposed by Mrs.

McIntyre and Mrs. Shortely leads to an oppressive social structure on the farm, the disintegration of their sense of self, and ultimately to horrific violence. By breaking down each aspect of the royal consciousness and how they are embodied in either Mrs. Shortely and/or Mrs. McIntyre, we can establish a socially redemptive framework through which to read the theme of displacement in this story.

Though both Mrs. Shortely and Mrs. McIntyre make claims to intentionally reject the influence of religion towards the beginning of the story, Mrs. Shortely oddly takes it upon herself to become more familiar with Christian doctrine in an attempt to protect herself and the farm from those, namely the Guizacs, "...who had come from a place continually fighting, where the religion had not been reformed" as she believes that "with this kind of people, you had to be on the lookout every minute" (205). Her fear of the Guizac's foreignness results in Mrs. Shortely's embodiment of a religion of immanence. Subconsciously, perhaps, Mrs. Shortely recognizes the power her own mission to remove the Guizacs would gain by aligning it with her perception of God's will. Propelled by distorted intentions, Mrs. Shortely embraces reading scripture daily in search of whatever piece of God's word echoes her own desires, in turn, reinforcing her own sense of power and entitlement. One day after contemplating the scriptures,

"She saw plainly that the meaning of the world was a mystery that had been planned and she was not surprised to suspect that she had a special part in the plan because she was strong. She saw that the Lord God Almighty had created the strong people to do what had to be done and she felt that she would be ready when she was called" (209).

It is evident how Mrs. Shortely's newfound commitment to Christianity, fueled by fear of the other, is in fact furthering her sense of superiority, or her "special part in the plan", over the

Guizacs. This example is not used to argue this as an inherent consequence of religion but to highlight the dangerous assumption of a religion of immanence and fueling one's will to power with the assumed support of the divine. Mrs. Shortley clearly admits to faith having never much concerned her, and yet "with the coming of these displaced people she was obliged to give new thought to a good many things" (204). She begins explaining to Mr. Shortely and the other farm hands the horrors and violence occurring in Europe at the time as a consequence of "...these people [who] did not have an advanced religion" (198). Though Mrs. Shortely never directly vocalizes her belief that the Divine is fully supporting her to the marginalized groups on the farm, a religion of affluence plays a significant enough role in shaping the perspective of one of the major focalized characters that it cannot be easily ignored.

Just as Mrs. Shortely embodies the oppressive nature of a religion of immanence, Mrs. McIntyre contributes to the installment of the royal consciousness through the economics of affluence. However, while Martin describes an economics of affluence as the false insistence that prosperity is universally experienced, Mrs. McIntyre flips this definition on its head insisting instead that economic poverty is experienced by all on the farm and uses this reversal as a means of maintaining a sense of authority. Mrs. McIntyre, who has seen three husbands come and go, embraces a position of isolated responsibility for the economic standing of the property. Constantly concerned by the fear of not having enough, Mrs. McIntyre makes her priorities clear at the beginning of the story when she refuses to provide curtains for the Guizac's home, insisting that she is "not made of money" (196). Her love of wealth even seeps through as she recalls the memory of her latest dead husband who she "truly liked" as he was "famous all over the county for being rich" and always had a "peculiar odor about him of sweaty fondled bills..." (218). Instead of falsely claiming the economic prosperity of all and dismissing claims of

inequality, Mrs. McIntyre insists that she experiences a greater deficit than anyone else. In fact, in a moment of despair, she goes as far as to convince herself that "...there was nobody poorer in the world than she was" (221). This perspective allows Mrs. McIntyre to justify instrumentalizing the poor white, black, and immigrant workers on the farm as a means to economic prosperity. Though Mrs. McIntyre's economics of paucity breaks the mold from Brueggeman's original economics of affluence, it ultimately serves the same societal purpose of gaining power.

As a result of reducing the marginalized farmhands to economic instruments, Mrs. McIntyre holds them at fault for the economic failure she experiences. In a conversation with Mrs. Shortely, she utilizes derogatory stereotypes to explain her frustration. "I've barely been making ends meet and [the farmhands] all take something when they leave. The niggers don't leave- they stay and steal. A nigger thinks anybody is rich he can steal from and that white trash thinks anybody is rich who can afford to hire people as sorry as they are. And all I've got is the dirt under my feet!" (203). Mrs. McIntyre again emphasizes her own poverty and externalizes the blame to those around her while failing to recognize their poverty, assuming she is the only one who unjustly experiences economic struggle. The oppression and violence caused by Mrs. McIntyre's inability to find intrinsic value in the other will be examined further but it is important to note that O'Connor frames this destructive characteristic through an economic lens.

The final and all-encompassing aspect of royal consciousness is a politics of oppression- what will be defined here as a systematic social order that leaves little or no agency for marginalized groups and "numbs those who suffer under its reign, those who experience suffering but feel helpless to give voice to that suffering" (Martin, 140). While Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortely are justly found guilty of imposing both a religion of immanence and an

economics of affluence into the social construct of the farm, they are both perpetrators *and* victims of the greater oppressive political structure of post-war America that O'Connor's story critiques. Mrs. McIntyre particularly victimizes Mrs. Shortely by instilling in her the fear of being displaced, and thus creates a violent domino effect Martin explains as such: "Upon [Mr. Guizac's] arrival, Mrs. McIntyre uses his presence as a veiled threat to the Shortelys who, in turn, use the presence of the displaced person to attempt to establish themselves as less dispensable on the farm than the Negroes, Astor and Sulk....Primarily, she wishes to use him to control her other workers" (141). Though Mrs. McIntyre is not portrayed as conniving or intentionally crafting the social disintegration of the farm's community, her will to power and fight for her own secure placement in society at large eventually have this effect. "Once again," Martin explains, "Mrs. McIntyre practices the politics of oppression, playing one employee off another for her own purposes....She lumps the displaced Pole with all of the other people in the world over whom she feels superior" (149).

While maintaining a distance from assumptions of author's intent, Martin's framework identifying O'Connor as a prophet of cultural critique allows us to simultaneously hold Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortely accountable for the violent displacement of others caused by their will to power, while also noting how they themselves experience displacement in systemic politics of oppression. Martin explains one of the defining characteristics of a politics of oppression as an apathetic response to injustice caused by the lack of a sense of agency to create change (140). "Cultural numbness," he writes, "must be attacked in two ways. The prophet must first give voice to the suffering experienced by those displaced by the royal consciousness and then offer the people a new vision" (140). While O'Connor's story within this framework startles us out of "cultural numbness", its conclusion, full of mystery and ambiguity only hints at this

“new vision”. Instead of a clear, presented solution, the end of the story leaves the majority of characters in a state of both social and physical displacement. This invites us as readers to look more closely at the way displacement functions in the story to both create and disrupt the politics of oppression and dissolve royal consciousness while also opening up a space for modern theorists to engage with O’Connor’s work.

Firstly, we must consider the historical backdrop of “The Displaced Person”. Though set in an unspecified rural, Georgian town, the historical context of the story is made evident and as Rachel Carrol describes in her essay “Foreign Bodies: History and Trauma in Flannery O’Connor’s ‘The Displaced Person’”, “The memory of the Holocaust becomes the screen on which unresolved conflicts are re-enacted” (98). Though the Guizacs ultimately experience a second displacement from Mrs. McIntyre’s farm, it is imperative to remember that their original motivation for coming to the U.S. was to urgently escape the violence of the Holocaust. They have been displaced from their own home only to be met with further estrangement from a foreign culture. The way in which the Guizac’s initial physical displacement is perceived on the farm is summarized well in a conversation when Astor, the eldest, black worker, asks Mrs. Shortely the meaning of referring to the Guizacs as “Displaced Persons”; to which she responds:

“‘It means they ain’t where they were born at and there’s nowhere for them to go- like if you was run out of here and wouldn’t nobody have you.’ ‘It seems like they here, though,’ the old man said in a reflective voice. ‘If they here, they somewhere.’...The illogic of Negro-thinking always irked Mrs. Shortely. ‘They ain’t where they belong to be at,’ she said.” (199)

It should be noted from this conversation how Astor, the most socially displaced and powerless on the farm, recognizes that if the Guizacs are here, “they somewhere”, an

acknowledgement of their right to claim the new placement as their own. The historical backdrop of the Holocaust serves as a sort of foreshadowing, alerting readers to how the societal microcosm of the farm will reenact some of the same oppressive and marginalizing ideology. It also speaks to misconceptions of modernity as an inherent bettering of society. As Carroll explains, “The Holocaust not only explodes a liberal myth of history as progress, but is itself enlisted by reactionary impulses in a renunciation of history as a process of change” (99). In “The Displaced Person”, O’Connor uses a global, modern trauma causing a widespread physical displacement of many people as the catalyst that sparks the more particular conflict and violence on Mrs. McIntyre’s farm.

The Guizac’s physical displacement is received with a more abstract form of social displacement once they arrive on the farm. Mrs. Shortely’s perception of the Guizacs, and of the European conflict in general, falls victim to a technological distancing from reality after seeing a newsreel briefly portraying the horrors of the Holocaust. Mrs. Shortely cannot seem to separate her perception of “the kind of thing that was happening every day in Europe where they had not advanced as in [the U.S.]” (196) from her reception of the Guizacs as individuals who have experienced the reality of mass violence. Upon first encountering the Guizacs,

Mrs. Shortely recalled a newsreel she had once seen of a small room piled high with bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, their arms and legs tangled together, a head thrust in here, a head there, a foot, a knee, a part that should have been covered up sticking out, a hand raised clutching nothing. Before you could realize that it was real and take it into your head, the picture changed and a hollow-sounding voice was saying, “Time marches on!” (196)

Technology, another aspect of modernity, has created here a distancing effect between Mrs. Shortely's perception of global trauma and her sense of its "realness". As Carrol aptly explains, "Mrs. Shortely places the Polish refugees (who have been resettled on her land) in the monochrome, two-dimensional plane of the screen as if they were shadowy simulations..." (98). Betsy Bolton, professor at Swathmore College, also discusses estrangement from reality caused by technology in her essay "Placing Violence, Embodying Grace: Flannery O'Connor's 'Displaced Person'". Bolton insists that one of the consequences of the advancing, widespread use of technology is a breach between the viewer of violence and those that suffer from it. "Suffering is everywhere but in the 'I' of the beholder," she claims (87). Bolton ends her essay by saying, surprisingly, that this story is in fact not about the displaced person at all, but instead about how technology and vision can alter the perception of the viewer and create an unsympathetic separation between themselves and victims- arguably a violence all of its own. Shielded by the compartmentalization of these shocking images to her television screen, Mrs. Shortely is allowed to accept both that "Time marches on!" and that she need not have awareness of her own contribution to oppressive sociopolitical structures, justifying her perception of the Guizacs' trauma in remaining two-dimensional and limited to stereotypes.

Stereotyping serves as another form of displacement in the story as Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortely restrict the Guizacs to a limited perception void of complex identities and motivations. In fact, as readers we are far more privy to the stereotypes enforced by Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortely than we are to the specifics of the Guizacs' personalities or histories. The repetition of stereotypes results in the Guizacs remaining estranged from full and equal participation in the farm's society. Mrs. Shortely's first sighting of the Guizacs reveals the stereotypes she possessed before ever having met them. "The first thing that struck her as very

peculiar was that they looked like other people. Every time she had seen them in her imagination, the image she had got was of the three bears, walking single file, with wooden shoes on like Dutchmen and sailor hats and bright coats and a lot of buttons” (195). For Mrs. Shortely, the Guizacs were never represented by human figures but by animal caricatures without a personal narrative. She also compares the Guizacs, who she silently refers to as the “Gobblehooks”, to “rats with typhoid fleas, [who] could have carried all those murderous ways over the water with them directly to this place” (196) and is filled with anxiety when “every time Mr. Guizac smiled, Europe stretched out in [her] imagination, mysterious, and evil, the devil’s experiment station” (205). Mrs. Shortely, in particular, repeatedly places the Guizacs as embodying all of the stereotypes, violence, and horror from whence they came. In turn, this form of displacement dehumanizes the Guizacs and instills fear in Mrs. Shortely, eventually leading to her own displacement from the limited world she calls her own.

Instrumentalizing the other, the final form of displacement depicted in “The Displaced Person”, was briefly analyzed through Mrs. McIntyre’s embodiment of the economics of affluence. However, it is important to extend this concept into conversation with the other forms of displacement previously explored. The displacement of human value from an intrinsic to an instrumental value has detrimental repercussions to several of the characters’ lives and to the overall social symbolism of the farm. Mrs. McIntyre, again, attaches value to a human life primarily by their ability to do efficient work on the farm, ultimately benefitting herself. Her strongest attachment to another individual is expressed in her exclamation of how Mr. Guizac’s work ethic will transform the farm. “‘But at last I’m saved!’ Mrs. McIntyre said. ‘One fellow’s misery is the other fellow’s gain. That man there,’ and she pointed where the Displaced Person had disappeared, ‘-he has to work! He wants to work! ...That man is my salvation!’” (203). Mrs.

McIntyre's lack of compassion for the reality of "one fellow's misery" causes her to displace those around her from the intrinsic value of their lives and place them as instruments of gain. This perspective becomes oppressive as it sets Mrs. McIntyre's own value as superior to those around her, with their lives as the means and her own well-being as the end. Mrs. Shortely also exhibits a sense of superiority, exemplified in the story through her first "inner vision" following her conversation with Astor, warning him in a threatening manner, against his potential replacement by the new influx of immigrants:

She was seeing the ten million billion of [the displaced people] pushing their way into new places over here and herself, a giant angel with wings as wide as a house, telling the Negroes that they would have to find another place. She turned herself in the direction of the barn, musing on this, her expression lofty and satisfied. (200)

Mrs. Shortely's version of herself as an angelic being with the heightened power to decide who remains placed and who becomes displaced exposes again the politics of oppression that the society of the farm has absorbed. The consequences of this absorption are catastrophic: Mrs. Shortely's unexpected heart attack, the murder of the Displaced Person, the dispersing of the farm hands, and the ambiguous decline of Mrs. McIntyre's health. How then, if O'Connor is portraying a community so ravaged by oppressive language and thought, can we gain anything from this story of societal redemption? For these answers I have found it most valuable to turn to Doreen Fowler's article "Flannery O'Connor's Productive Violence" and Julia Kristeva's book *Strangers to Ourselves*.

Fowler addresses O'Connor's work directly and, though she does not analyze "The Displaced Person" specifically, her theories are directly applicable to the theme of displacement. For example Fowler suggests that, "O'Connor's insistence on the purposive nature of violence

readily maps onto the white, Western logic of difference. This Western, exclusionary logic holds that a sense of individuation and autonomy issues out of a power struggle between opposing terms. The marginalization or violent suppression of one term in a binary guarantees the ascendancy of its opposite" (127-128). As we have seen, Mrs. Shortely's "exclusionary logic" originates in the fear of her own displacement and manifests itself in the way she marginalizes both the Guizacs and Astor and Sulk, the black workers. Using Fowler's argument it is apparent that in Mrs. Shortely, O'Connor has created a character that is not only in need of deep, individual redemption but who is representative of an oppressive structure much larger than herself- the "Western logic of difference." She believes that as long as she is to maintain power and placement on the farm, she must prevent, or at least limit, others from doing so. However, more internal than external change occurs the longer Mrs. Shortely is exposed to the difference, or as she calls it "the devilishness", of the Guizacs (203). The rigidity of her identity and her grounding in perceivable reality begins to disintegrate until one day she experiences her second vision. In this vision "the sky folds back in two pieces like the curtain to a stage" and a voice demands, "Prophecy!" to which Mrs. Shortely responds, "Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand. Who will remain whole? Who will remain whole? Who?" (210). Though startling and abrupt, this vision is significant in two distinct ways. Firstly, it is reminiscent of the horrific images of the Holocaust that initially served in setting the stage for Mrs. Shortely's stereotyped perception of the Guizacs. Secondly, it foreshadows the internal disintegration and displacement that Mrs. Shortely will experience for it is immediately following this vision she overhears Mrs. McIntyre discussing the Shortely's potential displacement from the farm in order to afford maintaining the Guizacs. In complete rage, she forces her family to leave immediately and as her daughters demand where they are going, Mrs.

Shortely is consumed by a third and final visionary moment. “All the vision in [her eyes] might have been turned around, looking inside her. She suddenly grabbed Mr. Shortely’s elbow and Sarah Mae’s foot at the same time and began to tug and pull on them as if she were trying to fit the two extra limbs on herself” (213). Just as she had prophesied “Who will remain whole?”, Mrs. Shortely recognizes for the first time the fragmentation of her own sense of selfhood and she reaches frantically to the others around her for wholeness. Fowler references Kristeva’s theory of abjection in order to fully explain the societally redemptive effects of the disintegration of self. Abjection, literally defined as “the state of being cast off”, has been appropriated by Kristeva as “the human reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between self and other...and it is this shattering of the ego, a transformative blurring of self and other than enables social change” (129). But does positive social change truly occur within the context of O’Connor’s story? After Mrs. Shortely’s death and Mr. Guizac’s murder, the story’s end comes rather abruptly at the abandoned farm where Mrs. McIntyre, “trying to save her declining health” (235), is left with no visitors but the old priest. We can conclude that the answer then is no. However, what is more important than the depiction of societal redemption is how O’Connor hands us the tools to construct it. As Fowler explains, “O’Connor’s fiction, like Kristeva’s theory, rewrites and corrects a Western assumption that the social order is a hierarchy wholly dependent on separation and division. In her works, O’Connor shows that socialization and civilization depend on a disintegration of the ego...that forges alliances with others; and this communion is figured as the action of grace” (129). Even working within a secular framework, Fowler finds the notion of grace key to O’Connor’s stories. Just as theological readings observe, grace is always extended by another and results in the recipient’s positive transformation. However, grace of the social realm, between the multitudes of people each holding within them a

world of difference, may be less obvious or direct than grace gifted from God, for while there is no divine truth, there are instead human truths at conflict with one another. As Fowler suggests, between one another “grace works to overcome and dissolve a human will to supremacy” (130) in order to create a place for those who are told they have none.

As Mrs. Shortely leaves the farm she not only crosses physical boundaries but boundaries of identity as well. Boundaries, Fowler explains, recur in O’Connor’s work signifying not only personal transformation, but also the liminal space between self and other where grace must be extended. Before her displacement, Mrs. Shortely finds her identity, her place, in the position of power she holds within the social order of the farm and finds it necessary to suppress the identity of others in order to preserve it. As she crosses the boundary between the farm and what lies beyond, however, she encounters a paradox: that as she loses her identity in encountering another’s, her rejection of the other dissolves, her sense of placement expands, and she is able to “contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country” (214).

“Strangely, the foreigner lives within us,” writes Kristeva, “...he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself” (1). In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva offers up another socially redemptive method for integrating the other that, I believe, bears much relevance to reframing “The Displaced Person”. Kristeva argues that adopting the viewpoint of ourselves as foreign, each bearing an inherent and equal “strangeness” within us, advocates for “no longer that of welcoming the foreigner within a system that obliterates him but of promoting the togetherness of those foreigners that we all recognize ourselves to be” (2-3). In the same way traditional readings of O’Connor argue equality in our estrangement from God, recognizing our shared foreignness could result in more widespread

receptivity of the other. O'Connor points to Mrs. McIntyre's own experience of herself as foreign immediately following the death of Mr. Guizac. "She only stared at him for she was too shocked by her experience to be quite herself. Her mind was not taking hold of all that was happening. She felt she was in some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives, and she watched like a stranger while the dead man was carried away in the ambulance" (235). After rejecting others' foreignness for the entirety of the story, Mrs. McIntyre is faced with accepting herself as a stranger and, in true O'Connor fashion, the story ends before we, as readers, can know how this acceptance will transform Mrs. McIntyre. However, "The Displaced Person" reveals that an intimate encounter with the other, one that leads to the disintegration of the ego and the recognition of one's own foreignness, does lead to the dissolution of oppressive power structures and it is within the ambiguity of O'Connor's ending that grace is again found as our imaginations are left to consider what will be built in its place.

Kristeva addresses the pertinence of accepting ourselves as foreign in the modern world when she poses, "As a still and perhaps ever utopic matter, the question is again before us today as we confront an economic and political integration on the scale of the planet: shall we be, intimately and subjectively, able to live with the others, to live as others, without ostracism...?" (1-2). Reframing O'Connor's fiction in a way that honors the mystery and ambiguity her work invokes permits the integration of divergent questions like Kristeva's into O'Connor scholarship. As we allow ourselves to step away from "mummifying" reiteration, we push the boundaries, not only of our understanding of O'Connor's work, but also our understanding of ourselves, into new, "tremendous frontiers".

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